

6

TIPS ON HOW TO NAVIGATE THE CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH SYSTEM

Guide for Families in Columbia, Montour, Snyder, and Union Counties of Pennsylvania

1 Start the Conversation

The first step is often the hardest. If you notice changes in your child's mood, sleep, or behavior:

- * Talk to your Child: Use open-ended questions like, "How have you been feeling lately?"
- * Consult your Pediatrician: Your doctor can rule out physical issues and provide an initial mental health screening.
- * If there is an immediate safety concern, call **CMSU crisis 1-800-222-9016** or go to your local Emergency room

4 Explore Levels of Care

There isn't a "one size fits all" treatment. Common options include:

- * Outpatient Therapy: Individual or family "talk therapy" sessions. This can be virtual or in person.
- * Intensive Behavioral Health Services (IBHS)-individualized program for home, community and school support.
- Case Management (RC/ICM/BCM): A dedicated person to help you coordinate appointments, school meetings, and community resources.
- * Family Based Mental Health (FBMH): Intensive, in-home therapy for the whole family.

* Please see CMSU's Tip sheet on service options in the CMSU area.

2 Check Your Coverage

Understanding your insurance helps determine which providers you can see.

- * Private Insurance: Call the number on the back of your card to ask for a list of "In-Network Behavioral Health Providers"
- * CMSU Residents who have MA: Contact Community Care Behavioral Health (CCBH) at 1-866-878-6046 for help finding providers. You can also visit their website at <https://members.ccbh.com/find-provider>

* CCBH Handbook



- * Medical Assistance (Medicaid): In PA, children with significant needs may qualify for MA regardless of family income (often called "Loophole" or PH95).
- * Need Help applying for MA for your child contact- Grey Medical Advocate, LLC 570-204-3930

5 Important Contacts

- * 24/7 Local Crisis (CMSU): 1-800-222-9016
- * National Suicide Crisis Lifeline: text or call 988
- * CMSU Behavioral Health Services: 570-275-4962 (Family Navigator and mental health questions)
- * MA Address update line 1-877-395-8930

For additional community resources in the CMSU area
<https://susquehannakids.com/findit/>



3 Access School Support

Your child's school is a vital partner in their mental health journey.

- * Request a SAP Referral: The Student Assistance Program (SAP) is a free, confidential team in every PA school that helps identify barriers to learning and links families to community resources.
- * In-School Counseling: Ask if your district offers school-based outpatient therapy or social work services.

6 Stay Connected

- * Maintain open communication: check in with school and providers.
- * Keep a Medical Folder: Organize all evaluations, Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), and provider contact info in one place.
- * Follow up on referrals.
- * Attend community workshops: Look for local events hosted by CMSU and your school district.
- * Most important-don't forget to prioritize self-care.



WHAT IS MENTAL HEALTH?

Mental health exists on a spectrum — everyone's experience is unique.

UNDERSTANDING YOUR CHILD'S MENTAL HEALTH

MENTAL HEALTH IS:

- An important part of overall health and well-being.
- Something everyone has, at all stages of life.
- Influenced by thoughts, feelings, experiences, and environment.
- Not always visible to others.
- A valid and real part of the human experience.

WHAT YOU MIGHT NOTICE:

Signs your child may be struggling:

- Big reactions or frequent mood changes.
- Withdrawal from family, friends, or activities.
- Changes in sleep or appetite.
- Difficulty concentrating or completing tasks.
- Increased worries, fears, or irritability.
- Physical complaints with no clear medical cause (stomachaches, headaches).
- Avoiding school or social situations.
- Saying negative things about themselves.

IMPORTANT THINGS TO KNOW:

Mental health challenges in children:

- Are not caused by bad parenting and are not attention-seeking behavior.
- May look different at different ages.
- Can improve with understanding, support, and early care.
- Are more common than many people think.
- Do not define your child's worth, potential, or future.

HOW CAN YOU HELP?

- Let them talk and just listen.
- Validate feelings. "I see this is really hard for you" goes a long way.
- Stay calm during big emotions.
- Keep routines predictable. Structure creates safety.
- Teach coping skills (deep breathing, breaks, movement, creative outlets).
- Watch your language. Avoid shaming.
- Model healthy emotional expression.
- Seek help early. Pediatricians, school counselors, and therapists are supports.

WHEN TO SEEK HELP:

- Difficulties last more than a few weeks.
- Your child is having academic or behavioral struggles.
- Your child is struggling with peers, friendships, family relations and isolation.
- Your child talks about hopelessness, self-harm or suicide.
- Decrease in self esteem or self worth.
- Change in hygiene, appearance and routines.
- You feel overwhelmed or unsure how to help.

*For further assistance contact CMSU and ask to speak with the Family Navigator 570-275-4962.

***If there is an immediate safety concern, call CMSU crisis 1-800-222-9016 or go to your local Emergency room.**

